

Apostle John and the robber



Lev Tolstoy

The Apostle John and the Robber by Lev Tolstoy

After Jesus Christ's death his disciples went to different lands, preaching his teaching in words and deeds. Christ's beloved disciple, John, preached in the rich trading cities of Greece. In one city, during a sermon, he saw a young man in the crowd. The young man listened and did not take his eyes off the speaker. After the sermon, the apostle John called him and had a long talk with him. He saw that the young man was ready to accept the teaching of Christ with all his heart, that his soul was burning but he had no faith. "He needs a reliable friend and adviser," thought John, "or he'll get off the right way and will go after bad people." The apostle was planning to go farther to preach in other places, and before leaving he led the young man to a bishop and said to him: "I'm leaving, and you take care of him: strengthen his faith in Christ, guard him from all that is bad". The bishop promised, took the young man into his house, taught him and baptized. Having baptized him, the bishop stopped caring for him as he did before; "Now, with baptism, he is saved from all evil", thought the bishop.

The young man took up with bad companions, with them began boozing, debauching. Sometimes he felt remorse, but he no longer had true faith to leave the bad life. Riotous life needed money. He started gaining it in dishonest ways; and left the town and started to live by robbery. Soon he became famous for his bravery, and the robbers chose him to be their ataman.

The apostle John returned from the sermon, came to the bishop and asked: "Where's the treasure that you took to keep?" The bishop at first did not understand what the Apostle asked about; he thought that John asked him about money which were donated to the poor and sick. "I ask you not about money," said John, "but about the brother's soul. I left you a young man, where is he?" - "He has died", the bishop answered sadly. "When has he died? What death has he died?" asked the apostle. - "His soul got blind, and he became the villain, robber, the soul killer," replied the bishop.

The Apostle did not expect such news; he got upset to tears, and said to the bishop: "Woe to him, and woe to all of us! You was not a reliable friend and

mentor to him, otherwise he would not leave you: I know his young, fervent soul. And what did you do to return him, to save him?" The bishop remained silent. John said the people around: "Give me a horse, quickly, and show the way to the mountains." People began to discourage him: "Do not ride – there is no direct nor roundabout way for anyone because of the robbers. Do not kill yourself, teacher". But John did not listen to them, took the horse and prepared to go. People felt ashamed to allow the old man go there alone; several people have volunteered to conduct him. They rode; entered the forest, began to climb up the mountain. The climb was steep, it was difficult to ride. So they drove for a long time. Finally, a few robbers appeared ahead of them. People got frightened and rushed back, but John went ahead to meet them. The robbers seized him. They were surprised that he did not defend himself, and did not ask for his mercy. "Lead me to your ataman," John told them. The robbers led the old man to their place. Ataman saw his robbers returned, and went out to meet them. As soon as he glanced at the roped person, he immediately recognized John: got pale, trembled, and turned to run away. John started to call him: "My son, stop, hear me out!" But the robber did not turn around and went farther and farther into the forest. The robbers retreated from John, ceased holding him and could not understand how this weak unarmed old man could frighten their ataman. John went after the robber. The old apostle got so exhausted from the long journey that he could barely walk, but the young robber did not stop. Out of fatigue and anxiety, John legs got shaky. He stopped, gathered his strengths and for the last time with trembling voice cried to the robber: "Take pity on me, my son! I can't go after you any further, come you to me. Why are you afraid of me, why did you stop believing me? I - John; remember how you first loved and listened to me!" The robber stopped, turned to John and waited for him. John approached him, moving his feet with difficulty, but the robber stood, waiting for him, and stared at the ground. Finally, John came but the robber still stood, head bowed. Apostle silently put his hand on his shoulder. The robber trembled, dropped his weapon out of his hands, and, sobbing, hugged the teacher, put face on his chest. - "I came for you, my son," John told him quietly. "Come with me into the town to brothers". - "I won't." Replied the robber, "Leave me; I am a lost person. I am cursed by God and people; I have nowhere to go. I no longer can live the way I did, the only thing left for me is to put hands on myself". - "My son, don't do it, don't say so! Our life in the

flesh is the will of God; to kill your flesh means to go against the will of God - to tempt him. And remember, I told you about the robber, repented on the cross? At the last moment he received the blessing". - "People will not forgive me, they won't believe that I repented, and won't accept me." - "Do not be afraid, my son, people will forgive when God forgives, I will pray so they do you no harm, you will again start your honest, working life, and by love for them you will repay your previous crimes. Don't delay, decide sooner!" That's how John coaxed his disciple, and the robber believed him, and his soul has softened. - "Let's go, teacher!" He exclaimed, "With you I am not afraid of the most brutal punishment; lead me where you like, soothe my troubled soul!" The old man leaned on the arm of the young robber, and they went back. Ataman said goodbye to his fellows, told them about his past life, about John, and persuaded them to leave the robbery.

John returned to town with the robber and took him into the church. The apostle put him next to himself and said, "Brothers, here is the one whom you thought was gone astray. Rejoice: our brother has returned to us". And John persuaded the brethren to accept the repentant one, and concluded his speech with the words of the parable, told by the savior: "Bring the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found!" (Luke 15: 23 & 24).